

# SMML Newsletter



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A Rehabilitation:

The Writer and Populist Activist, Marion Marsh Todd

by

Pauline Adams and Emmas S. Thornton

Nowadays observers of the American experience are becoming increasingly aware of people in the shadows of our history. The Populist Movement that rose out of the discontent of Americans in the last decade of the nineteenth century was, by its very nature, filled with these shadowy figures. Though dedicated to, and influential in the cause of Populism, many failed to catch the attention of historians. Marion Marsh Todd is one of these obscure people who deserves to be pulled from the shadows.

Though born at Plymouth, New York, in March 1841, she lived most of her life in Michigan. She was the daughter of a Universalist minister, Abner Kneeland Marsh and Dolly Adelia Wales; she married Benjamin Todd, a lawyer from Boston in 1868. Todd typifies the nineteenth century woman activist both by her energetic involvement in public life and her personal history.

With her parents and the other six Marsh children, Marion Marsh moved to Eaton Rapids, Michigan, in 1851 where her father died the following year. She attended Ypsilanti Normal School and then taught until her marriage. The Todds had one daughter, Lulu. In the late 1870's they moved to San Francisco where Marion enrolled in Hastings Law College.

Her husband died in 1880. The following year she withdrew from school without a degree but gained admittance to the state bar. Like many of her contemporary women lawyers, she became politically active though she had no vote. In 1882 she ran for state attorney general on the Greenback-Labor ticket; though she lost, she led her ticket in votes. By 1886, having returned to Michigan, she continued in reform politics: as a delegate to the Knights of Labor General Assembly in Richmond, Virginia; as a co-founder of the Union Labor Party (1887); as a lecturer for political reform. In 1890 she moved to Chicago to edit the Chicago Express, a nationally circulated, reform weekly. Todd soon returned to Michigan, living in Eaton Rapids, Hillsdale, and Springport. A record of her death has not been found, but it occurred about 1914.

Between 1886 and 1902, she authored eight books: five on critical political issues and three novels. An analysis of Todd's works leads to the conclusion that the quality of her five political tracts exceeds that of her later fictional efforts. Each of those political tracts dealt with one of the major problems identified by the Populists--problems that became political issues: the protective tariff, the currency question, the railroad industry, woman's rights.

The title of her first book outlines its contents. The book, Protective Tariff Delusions, was published in 1886. The delusions abroad in the nation that she exposed were several. According to Todd, Protectionists claimed the

protective tariff brought 1) a greater amount of wealth to the nation, 2) a greater productivity, 3) higher wages (p. 7), 4) increased immigration, 5) a home market for the farmer and better prices for his produce (p. 9). She used relevant and irrelevant arguments, statistics, case studies, quotations, even ruminations to attack the Protectionist claims. She concluded that protective tariffs were a form of class legislation that benefited only a few millionaires. "Protection to America has enabled a few men to extend their clutches, until, today, we find ourselves a nation of paupers, presided over by a few millionaires; until, today, we find a handful sitting upon their throne of special privileges, gazing with fiendish appetites over the triumph of their harvest. . . . [The resulting] Poverty is the mother of crime, and our almshouses and penitentiaries were never as full as now." (p. 101) At another point, when discussing the same problems of class division, poverty, and crime, she noted that those problems bring "us face to face with the great need for a more extended market in which to trade." (p. 49) Essentially, in this book, free trade was her remedy for those social problems.

Todd's next two books were Honest(?) John Sherman or a Foul Record (1890) and an elaboration of that work, Pizarro and John Sherman (1891). In those books the major culprit responsible for social ills was the scarcity of money in circulation. Her arguments and methods, however, were



similar to the ones used in Protective Tariff Delusions. The nation was in an unhealthy state. The cause was "class legislation" which limited the supply of money; hence it benefited the creditor and hurt the debtor. The major victimizer was Senator John Sherman. The real victim was America. In all three books it is clear that Todd was convinced that by legislative fiat America could be cleansed just as by legislative fiat it had been befouled.

Todd's chief oeuvre was Railways of Europe and America, published in 1893 with a second edition in 1895. It is for this work that historians specializing in Populism know her, if at all. More research, more time, more thought, more careful documentation went into the writing of this book than into any of her others. Todd presented tables comparing aspects of the 1890 American and European railway industries: equipment, stock, trackage, workers, accident records, passenger and freight rates. She concluded from the assembled facts in these tables that "[railroad magnates] know no people, no party, no God--but the God of Greed, based upon unrighteous dividends and watered stock." (p. 13) "Whether the Railways shall own the people or the people own the Railways" (p. 3) was the serious question she posed for herself in this book. Her answer was clear: nationalize the American Railroad industry.



These four books focus on the economic sector of America of the 1880's and 90's. The issues Todd confronted were significant economic issues of the day: the Protective tariff, the currency question, railroad abuses. These very same economic issues are as significant today. The Protective tariff, whether in its classical form or its modern dress of trigger pricing or voluntary export quotas, is still considered a primary cure for ailing American industries by some people, mainly businessmen and union leaders. Inflation is the currency issue of today. And the transportation industry, including the railroads, is still beset by the century old problems of government regulation, efficient service, and safety. But back to Todd. Her analysis was typical of Populist analysis, and her recommendations were consistent with the People's Party Platform of 1892. Todd was a lawyer and her form of argument is reminiscent of the techniques of some fictional courtroom lawyers' attempts to discredit witnesses. She used all arguments, great and small, appropriate and inappropriate, logical and intuitive, hoping that her readers would be persuaded somewhere along the line. Persuasion, she believed, would activate the voters to elect better people to public office, out of which would come a better America.

The place of women in American society assumed as much of Todd's attention as did the economic problems. Thus, when Professor Goldwin Smith, a then noted historian at Cornell University, attacked women's suffrage in an article entitled "Woman's Place in the State" which appeared in The Forum, in January 1890, Todd reacted quickly, vehemently, amusingly in a book called Professor Goldwin Smith and His Satellites in Congress.

Professor Smith had argued as follows: Woman's suffrage means handing over the government to women. But government is really the domain of man. Government requires the "robustness" and "muscle" of men not the "tenderness and purity" of women. Voting is not a natural right inherent in all human beings. "Suffrage is not a right but a privilege," and women, being the "angelic portion of humanity" are unfitted for the political struggle. Thus one finds him saying: "If government requires masculine understanding or temperament [This assumption Professor Smith accepts as true], and if the practical character by which political questions are to be best settled resides in man, whose sphere is the world, rather than in woman, whose sphere is the home, that is the reason for preferring such government and legislation, quite independent of any invidious comparisons whether intellectual or moral." (pp. 519-520). Smith concluded:

"To man, as he alone could enforce the law, the sovereign power came naturally and righteously." (p. 530)

Todd parried Professor Smith's thrusts. She seized a word, like "robustness," from Smith's article and made it a topic for an entire chapter. She teased it, mauled it, played with it, chewed it. When she finished, the reader would have found it difficult to take Smith's contentions seriously. Over and over again she repeated this process, using anecdotes, newspaper accounts, quotations, biblical allusions, arguments, even history in playing her game. At times she was trapped into asserting that woman's "moral status in nature exceeds that of man" (p. 151) (in quoting Elizabeth Cady Stanton) thus making a non-physical distinction between the sexes. But for the most part, she was remarkably modern in her feminist views. For example, she believed that liberation of women also meant a liberation of men. "For women not to demand [equality], is not to be cultured, and for our women not to be cultured is woe unto the race of men." (p. 165) She expanded on this idea, writing not only about equal suffrage but about equal and higher wages in the workplace. Despite the past "enslavement of women," Todd ended her book on an optimistic note. She was confident that woman's suffrage was inevitable "according to the order of progress." (p. 163) "Yes," she affirmed, "it belongs to women to render [justice] to the present and rising generations as can only be rendered by freedom's environments."



What is intriguing in this book is the sense she made. She saw through many of the myths, myths still alive today. She ridiculed, with a sense of style, Smith's more outrageously sexist assertions. What is impressive is her genuine concern for the struggling men and women on the fringe of her contemporary America. What is repugnant, perhaps it is more accurate to say amusing yet irritating, is her occasional sentimentality, not only of language but of thought.

All her political tracts grew out of the exciting and hopeful political climate of the late 1880's and early 1890's when the People's Party was at its peak. Activists like Marion Marsh Todd were convinced that they were on the verge of seizing sufficient power in the governmental sector to accelerate human progress. Thus, in all her works so far discussed, Todd relied on the political process as the tool by which to effect change. By the last half of the 1890's, the People's Party had disappeared. Todd adapted to this change by writing novels instead of political tracts to stir her readership to action. Apparently, she abandoned the political process, as did many Populists, and turned to different arenas. She replaced the specifics of railroad abuses, of protective tariffs, of the amount of currency in circulation, of the equality of women with the more abstract concerns about spiritual growth, personal integrity, justice and human compassion for the poor.



Todd wrote an introduction to her first novel wherein she established her reason for writing fiction.

The common novelist studies to lay plots and present plausible situations, while reality, more terrible and touching with no impossible situations, is oftener unwritten and unknown.

Our standard romance writers picture both real and ideal life, thus in a measure they become the historians of the customs, habits, thoughts and progress of a race. The realistic fiction of a Zola may shock the reader, but if the lesson gleaned excuses its existence, the same apology may be offered in the publicity of reality.

If by drawing attention to the tales of living woe, one heart softens and understanding quickens, creating a resolve to help change conditions for the betterment of God's children, an useful lesson will have been taught.

To present a few hitherto unwritten lessons is my purpose. In the face of existing situations the propriety of so doing will hardly be questioned, though facts may shock and cheeks may burn.

There are living pictures which should be framed and placed upon the walls of every home, as a supplication to the world.

There is a world within a world today asleep. There are churches loudly preaching Christ that shamefully lack his spirit. There are stratas of society with no heart for humanity. The greed of wealth is abroad in the land, and the hungry wolf growling at the door of the poor. Thus we must write.

We were stymied in this study in that we were unable to find more than the briefest part of that first novel, Rachel's Pitiful History, and had had, thus, to rely on a

secondary report of its content. According to Professor Paul L. Murphy in his entry on Todd in Notable American Women, Rachel's Pitiful History (published in 1895) was a novel of "political and social protest, lachrymously chronicling the tragedy of human exploitation and debauchery, which she blamed on the capitalist system, and criticizing the churches for their hypocrisy in not rising to their social responsibilities." Though we were unable to read that first novel, we were able to read her third and final novel, Claudia, published in 1902 and dedicated to her daughter. Here, the sentimentality noted by Murphy remains a primary characteristic, but the political and social protest has undergone a change. While this protest is still there in the background, the foreground has been usurped by a plea for the regeneration of the human soul. Furthermore, we found no evidence of the attack on the capitalist system as a system that Murphy reported. Rather, Todd proposed to eliminate the personal greed bred by a competitive system by an amorphous spiritual regeneration. By competitive system she meant the competition between employer and employee over the distribution of profits rather than the competition between one business firm and another. Most significantly, she nowhere attacked private ownership of the means of production; instead, she viewed this private ownership as the instrument "to help change conditions for the betterment of God's children."



The plot of this novel revolves around well-born Claudia and her search for a husband among three suitors. Her father wants her to marry Paul Clayton, a successful business man, but Claudia refuses; she cannot "love at will." She prefers the new minister, Phillip Vance, who, though motherless at age ten, "possessed [his mother's] great heart, broad intelligence, and intuitive sense." Phillip appears to reciprocate Claudia's affection. But, after a long discourse with his close friend, Henry Arthur, Phillip discovers that though he respects Claudia he doesn't love her. Henry persuades Phillip the marriage would be a mistake. Phillip writes to stop marriage plans. Claudia swoons, sickens, almost dies. Conveniently widowed, conveniently wealthy, "generous and kind, frank and fearless" Henry woos and wins Claudia. The book has little action, much talk--talk about evolution, growth, reincarnation, the burdens of the rich. Here is one abbreviated example. Phil to Henry: "You were not created for your wealth, but your wealth for you. The poor have opportunities which are lost to those who are swallowed up in wealth." But all this talk is shallow and unrealistic. For example, poverty is portrayed by a barefoot ten-year-old, Jack Thomas, and his dying friend, Dick Traver. Though Jack is poorly educated and lives a rough, tough life, he has a sense of fair play; he has a compelling desire to see circuses even if it.

means sneaking in without paying; he has a love for his dying friend. Claudia first comes across Jack as he makes his way, orange-in-hand, to his dying friend's "dilapidated little cottage in the hollow," and she accompanies him on his errand of mercy. After Dick dies and is properly buried "in a pretty casket," thanks to Claudia, Claudia rewards Jack for being such a loving friend to Dick. The following conversation takes place:

[Jack] "The orange I took to Dick wa'n't so nice as these here ones, but the man wouldn't gin me the nicest 'cause I didn't have only two pennies." Claudia replies: Jack, when you spent all your pennies for an orange for Dick you didn't know you were going to get a whole bag of oranges in return, did you?" (p. 81)

Thus Jack is rewarded for his generosity to Dick. Claudia is rewarded for her generosity to the poor children not only by feeling properly virtuous but more than that her life will evolve happily onward and upward thereafter. This form of justice, this repayment for helping those in need, this order of human progress also rewards Henry Arthur, the wealthy businessman who finally marries Claudia. Henry has assimilated Phillip's lesson that "a man must work for others as for himself, if he would know the best of life." Henry draws up a plan by which he will share his business profits with his workers.

The percent of my income which shall be set aside for the benefit of the needy will not be a fixed one. A man can appropriate but little of a vast fortune upon himself to



advantage, hence it's not much credit to himself to be generous. . . . [This is] a most refreshing feature [of] my business life. . . . [I have] greater ambition than ever before. . . . I shall open a business in which the employees shall share the profits. The plans are already perfected, and they are only just, for who have a better right to share in the profits of a business than those who produce them? . . . I do not expect to solve the labor problem. In fact, I am ignorant upon this question . . . . [Probably] I should be ashamed [of this fact]. I am merely following an impulse to help the unfortunate in the way that is open to me. There is no sacrifice involved on my part, and hence I deserve no praise.

We, the readers, know that, unlike Henry's first wife, Claudia is sympathetic to Henry's compassion for the poor and his sense of human justice. This marriage will be a healthy one, "wholesome and beautiful," enlarging "the soul of humanity."

Todd had promised in the introduction to her first novel that she would rouse her readership to the harsh realities of the world as the Populists saw that world. While she succeeded in keeping that promise in her political tracts, she failed in her fiction except on the most superficial and sentimental level. Thus, despite the harsh judgment of Todd's fiction, the total of her life's work deserves serious attention by students of late nineteenth century literature and by scholars of American Populism and by chroniclers of Michigan history.

Michigan State University

Change, Growth, and the Human Dilemma in  
Booth Tarkington's The Magnificent Ambersons

Douglas A. Noverr

Booth Tarkington's The Magnificent Ambersons received the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1919, the first of two Pulitzer Prizes he would receive. The novel appeared in 1918 just before the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919, which saw 20 million people die; just before the "Big Red Scare" of 1919-1920, which signalled the beginning of the anti-foreigner hysteria and the resulting immigration quota system; just before the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles; just before the ratification of the Prohibition Amendment; and just before the farm depression of 1919-1923, which would see the agricultural population drop 1 1/2 million by 1928. Tarkington's second major novel appeared at a unique moment in American life. The full impact of America's involvement in World War I had not yet been felt, and it would take the return of disillusioned and cynical veterans to raise the consciousness of the nation regarding the horrors and misguided idealism of that war. Woodrow Wilson's attempt to sell the League of Nations membership would further bring out divided ethnic loyalties, political

opportunism, and isolationist sentiment. The country was headed for its period of "Dementia Praecox," as Thorstein Veblen termed it, and this "unbalanced mentality" would bring religious fundamentalism, xenophobia, nativism, racism, and provincialism.

Tarkington's The Magnificent Ambersons chronicled the decline and collapse of the Amberson family wealth and social influence, and he traced the rise of new wealth in the family of Eugene Morgan, a lawyer turned mechanical genius and automobile producer, and his daughter, Lucy. The novel is set in a Midland city that was based on Tarkington's own Indianapolis, and timewise the novel straddles two centuries--the late Victorian period of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century with its triumphant modernism. This complex and carefully wrought novel has many levels of thematic development, and my purpose here is to show how Tarkington develops these themes and interconnects them to make a significant philosophical statement about change and the ways people react and adjust to changes. In this novel these changes are deep rooted and pervasive--affecting fortunes, identities, basic patterns of life, and outlooks. In developing his cultural analysis, Tarkington focuses on the city as the force that transforms all with its inexorable laws of



growth, industrialization, changing housing patterns, and new economic realities. The dynamic city rolls right over the heart of Major Amberson, the family patriarch who made his fortune in 1873. The quality of life and society deteriorates as the secure old order breaks down and loses control.

The old order, represented by the first and second generation Ambersons, provided a solid and secure center to city life during the late nineteenth century. The Amberson mansion was the focus of social activity, and seasonal activities provided communal opportunities for shows of hospitality, good will, and meaningful traditions. In Chapters IV-XIV Tarkington describes the leisurely joys and deep contentment of the Christmastide season with its round of parties, dinners, and sleigh rides. This period of time is a homecoming for Eugene Morgan, a widower with a beautiful daughter. He has returned to Midland city after an absence of many years, and he renews his friendship with Isabel Amberson, whom he courted in his young manhood, and Aunt Fanny Minafer. He is quickly and easily accepted by them as an old friend, even though earlier he had disgraced himself while serenading Isabel, causing her to break off their engagement because he had been publicly drunk and stepped through a bass fiddle. George



Amberson Minafer, the son of Isabel and her only child, develops a mistrust for Eugene Morgan, but he begins seriously courting Morgan's only daughter.

Tarkington's treatment of the old order is nostalgic and largely approving. The Ambersons uphold the values of good manners, propriety, restraint, and generosity within the family. They are not aggressive or coldly calculating in their business affairs, and their conservatism in business affairs eventually proves to be their downfall. They are resistant to change, trying to hold on to illusions of family grandeur when all is slipping away. They fail with a quiet dignity, perplexed at their demise.

Isabel Amberson Minafer is the most "magnificent" of the Ambersons. Although she spoils Georgie and allows him to be willful and abrasive in his early years, she represents the power of motherly love and devotion. She knows that there is an "angel" in her son and that her example of unselfish love will bring out the best in him and make a mature and responsible man out of an arrogant and spoiled boy. Even though she would like to marry Eugene Morgan after the death of her husband, Wilbur Minafer, she understands and accepts George's rejection of Eugene Morgan on the basis of pride in the

family name and a misguided concern for her reputation at the hands of the town gossips. Although Isabel is forced to renounce her own hopes of love and happiness, she is more concerned with her son's mental state and his unhappiness. Isabel represents the quality of magnanimity, a virtue that three others (George, Eugene Morgan, and Lucy) have to learn from her example of being generous and noble in forgiving. She forgives George his rash impetuosity and his lack of concern for her, knowing that he has other good qualities that can be nurtured. Isabel represents the power and influence of women to ennoble men's lives. She represents the transforming power of devoted and constant maternal love--an influence that extends beyond the family. This love engenders kindness and forgiveness, and it provides a core of feeling and wellspring for action that withstands all changes in fortune or situation.

George learns from the memory of his mother's love that he must ask Eugene Morgan's forgiveness for having shut him out of his mother's life and for having denied him the opportunity to see Isabel on her deathbed. He does this in the hospital, where he is in serious condition with two broken legs after being run down in the street by an automobile. Morgan, of course, has promoted the horseless carriage and now builds them on an assembly

line basis. Lucy Morgan has to overcome her hatred for George's arrogance and intractability, those qualities that caused her to reject him earlier as a marriage partner. She realizes that it is the woman's role to love fully and to forgive. She goes to the hospital where George has been taken without her father's knowledge or permission, thus asserting her freedom as a woman and rejecting the role of the passive Victorian lady in her garden living in an enclosed and isolated world. When Eugene Morgan arrives at the hospital, he realizes that to be true to the memory of Isabel he must be kind to Georgie and forget his past rancor for him. Lucy's reunion with George has already taken place, and she signals to her father that he should not accept George's asking for forgiveness and that no words are necessary in this reconciliation. She tells her father to take George's hand "gently," and her radiance fills the room as the spirit of Isabel Amberson Minafer fills the room. Lucy comes into her womanhood when she realizes the transforming power of love, devotion, and forgiveness. George has come into his manhood only after the collapse of the family fortune and his mother's death. He has proved himself by taking on hard and dangerous work (transporting dynamite and explosives) in order to support his impoverished and desperate Aunt Fanny Minafer



He has been properly and fully chastised as well as come to a full knowledge of his own improper and fateful managing of his mother's situation regarding Eugene Morgan.

Tarkington shows how George Amberson Minafer matures only with the setbacks and collapse of the family fortunes. He represents the positive and negative qualities of the old order. He is instinctively generous to needy family members, but this is in part because he has always taken money for granted and has had it spent on him or given to him. He is protective of women and wants to keep them from harm, and this virtue endears him to Lucy when he tries to break her fall and protect her from injury when they have an accident with a cutter that George is driving. Educated in the East and indifferent to an occupation or profession, George refuses to commit himself to a definite role in the workaday world. He wants to be a yachtsman or a skilled driver of a tandem or "eight in hand." He has a vague notion of doing public service or being involved in a cause (the noblesse oblige ideal), but he rejects politics as corrupt. He is the end of the line of gentlemanly privilege and leisure. He is painfully aware of being from the Midwestern upper class, and he tells Lucy Morgan at one point that he has shown Easterners how a Midwesterner can rightfully belong to the leisure class.

You know, yourself, there are a lot of people in the East--in the South, too, for that matter--that don't think we've got any particular family or position or culture in this part of the country. I've met plenty of that kind of provincial snobs myself, and they're pretty galling. There were one or two men in my crowd at college, their families had lived on their income for three generations, and they never dreamed there was anybody in their class out here. I had to show them a thing or two, right at the start, and I guess they won't forget it! Well, I think it's time all their sort found out that three generations can mean just as much out here as anywhere else. (p. 128)<sup>1</sup>

George is determined to show that the Amberson wealth can extend to the third generation and support it, but he is helpless to prevent the financial decline of the family. His "ideals" of a gentleman's role are fixed and dated, and he lacks the business acumen and resourcefulness that have transformed Eugene Morgan from a lawyer, to a mechanical genius, to an automotive tycoon. Lucy rejects George's love because he will not measure up to her father's ideals of success and hard work. George bitterly recriminates against Lucy's father because he believes that Eugene Morgan is trying to control his life and because Morgan's attentions to Isabel create scandalous gossip, at least he is led to believe this by his Aunt Fanny Minafer, who resents Eugene's love for Isabel since Fanny had a hopeless



crush on Eugene and wanted to believe that he was interested in her.

It is important to note that Isabel is denied her chance at happiness because of the strategems within her own family. Fanny manipulates George and encourages him to reject Eugene Morgan. George's chivalrous concern for his mother's reputation is misguided and comes partly out of his own unrecognized guilt over his lack of love for his father, Wilbur Minafer. George is possessive of his mother, bound to her because she represents the Amberson side of the family and because he cannot come to terms with the independence of Lucy Morgan and the terms she sets for their marriage. George desperately tries to hang on to the genteel and aristocratic past because it is the only role he knows. He takes his mother away to Europe for four years after he has seriously blundered in trying to stop the local gossip that Isabel would marry Morgan before a proper period of mourning had passed and that Isabel and Eugene had always been in love even when she was married to Wilbut Minafer. George's immaturity blinds him to the fact that his mother did love her husband and that her love for Eugene was a mature love of respect and satisfying companionship.

George's maturity can come only with time and a disastrous reversal of fortune. He cannot understand



the tradition of close friendships and emotional bonds that held together the previous generation in a spirit of generosity and mutual concern. George upholds the externals of the previous age without gaining its temperance and kindness, a culture value that went beyond the bonds of the family to unite communities in social bonds that minimized competition and class consciousness. George is a loner who lacks close friends. He always stands apart from social activities, commenting on them in his caustic and sardonic way because he can not share in the joy and spirit of communal activities that do not need family name or status to make them meaningful.

However, the old order is destined to be displaced despite its grace, charm, and genuinely human considerations. Modernism was inevitable, and the new order brings dynamic and relentless change. The Midland city spreads out as people escape the smoky and dirty environs around the factories. The extension of the urban city is a key theme in The Magnificent Ambersons because with this extension comes the loss of the center and the secure and knowable socio-economic structure.

The factories bring dirty air that prematurely ages the houses and the natural environment. As the city spreads out it engulfs the rural countryside, and the network of electricity, telephone, interurban, and

automobile changes the basic rhythm of life and the nature of social contacts. Society was becoming more diverse with the influx of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe, and success was increasingly measured in terms of money. The aggressive and business-oriented middle-class wanted prosperity, progress, and change regardless of the loss of human values or the liveability and manageability of life in the city. Tarkington describes the insatiable lust for growth in this chilling passage:

They were happiest when tearing down and building up were most riotous, and when new factory districts were thundering into life. In truth, the city came to be like the body of a great dirty man, skinned to show his busy works, yet wearing a few barbaric ornaments; and such a figure carved, coloured, and discoloured, and set up in the marketplace, would have done well enough as the god of the new people. (p. 195)

Tarkington documents the pervasive changes in city life by showing how the growing "booster" spirit of prosperity negated many of the human dimensions of the old order. Community life was more competitive, impersonal, and random. People did not know their neighbors, and one might go for a long period of time without seeing old friends. People accepted dirt, filth, the hazards and dangers of mechanical conveniences, and anonymity in return for prosperity and credit. The old aristocracy failed financially because it was too

conservative in its investments or too resistant to changes that could salvage finances (such as building tenements rather than single dwelling houses on decent lots). The new industrial millionaires were those who had mechanical and inventive genius, who found new ways of financing business ventures, who were aggressive and individualistic, and who could exploit the labor and mass consumer market. Tarkington notes that "a new Midlander--in fact, a new American--was beginning dimly to emerge." (p. 194) In his assessment of the changes in his native Midland Indianapolis Tarkington anticipated the changing civic spirit of America in the 1920's. He clearly saw how the marketplace set new social, moral, and personal values that denied or diminished older values that were inherent to a more coherent social order.

George Amberson Minafer is a victim of the new order, but he is not defeated by it. When he is forced to adjust to new realities, he does, but he does not take on the compulsive spirit of the new age. He accepts his anonymity and hazardous occupation, and he becomes practical, sensible, and responsible. However, only after he has fully realized the seriousness of his transgression against his mother's hopes for happiness, and only after he has been run down by the symbol of the modern age (the cheap, mass produced automobile). does George gain a full awareness of the tragedy of life.



He realizes that his pride has brought him down and that he must be as magnanimous in asking Eugene's forgiveness as his mother had earlier forgiven him his denial of her hopes. George finally realizes how the law of life is obscurity and loss of control over one's fortunes. Change is inevitable and often cruel, but not always fatal. His accident brings Lucy to him as she is able to see beyond his willfulness and to see the beauty of Isabel's love for her son. The memory of Isabel redeems all three persons, and her love becomes a legacy that endures and reunites the two families torn apart by change. The gentle taking of George's hand, which Lucy tells her father to do when he arrives at George's bedside at the hospital, is a symbol of the old age of kindness, unspoken and instinctive concern, and magnanimity. Lucy's "radiance" lightens the darkness of manly self pride and stubbornness. The memory of Isabel's unselfish love and forgiving kindness becomes the touchstone of reconciliation.

In The Magnificent Ambersons Tarkington created two of the most memorable and magnificent women characters in American fiction. He showed that women could provide spiritual and emotional values that would liberate men from selfishness and limited social roles. The women in this novel do not redeem men by changing them in the

stereotyped way of managing them, tempering their lusts and excesses, and bringing them under the control of religion. They do not manage and manipulate men's emotions because they can grant or deny sexual opportunities. The women liberate the men and bring out their potential for kindness, generosity, and noble behavior. Their role is not secondary or supportive; it is central and crucial to the continuation of human values. Lucy rejects the static and stereotyped role of the Victorian lady, and thus avoids the mistake of attaching herself to her father when she should claim the love that she feels for George. The old order redeems the new order and saves it from emotional stagnation.

In a letter to Booth Tarkington written on August 20, 1919, William Dean Howells wrote that George and his mother are "wonder-true, and they are marvelously managed. The atmosphere is our native MidWestern air. It is all very touching and tragic, cragic."<sup>2</sup> Howells instinctively recognized the emotional and moral truth of Tarkington's novel, and he saw the magnificence of the characters of Isabel and George. In a return letter to Howells, Tarkington expressed some doubts about his characters of Lucy and Eugene Morgan, seeing that they were possibly too stereotyped and lacked

emotional depth of character.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps Eugene's "conversion" is somewhat contrived, as he goes to a spiritual medium in New York City to make contact with Isabel and to be told that he should be "kind." But Tarkington should not have had any doubts about Lucy. Her change is believable and convincing. She has truly assumed the womanly spirit and grandness of Isabel, taking on a "radiance" that comes with doing what she knows in her heart to be right and fulfilling.

Lucy and George now represent the emotionally complete couple who have matured out of the test of experience. They represent the counterbalance to the new Midlander that Tarkington saw emerging without significant human values or spirit. Howells had insisted that realism was basically a matter of telling the truth about "the motives, the impulses, the principles that shape the life of actual men and women." In The Magnificent Ambersons Tarkington admired Howells' pioneering efforts at realism in fiction, especially Howells' study of relationships between the sexes, his sense of the complexities and contractions in people, his gauging of the elusive and changing qualities of human values, and his belief that even in routinized existence life could provide remarkable moments of connection and transcendence. Reality in Tarkington's



novel chastens and humbles, but it also brings about maturation and thresholds that promise new dimensions to character.

As the Midland town becomes an industrial city and as new capitalists emerged to set the terms of the economic order, Tarkington saw the Midwest (the new industrial corridor) as the crucible of national experience. He saw that the new man was in danger of being totally cut off from the past and consigned to the pursuit of material pleasures and satisfactions. But the Midwest had been a place of stability, honest and hard labor, small and liveable towns, and decent family and community life. On its modest scale it lacked the excesses or pretensions of the East or South. It is the place that Nick Carraway in The Great Gatsby returns to in order to regain his moral perspective. Nick's Midwest is one of fond memory, the anticipation of winter holidays as he travelled by train from Chicago to his home town. He was returning to a town society that was well structured and stable, for he notes that he is "a little complacent from growing up in the Carraway house in a city where dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name."<sup>4</sup>

George Amberson Minafer's fate is to see the Amberson Mansion and his mother's house torn down for tenements, the Amberson Hotel and Opera House transformed into a department store, the Amberson business block decayed and stagnated, and the family name erased from historical record. The magnificence of the past is blotted out by the demands of the present. The utilitarian and practical win out. The Midwest becomes an index of the nation, indeed the center of the nation. It was no longer a special region or place where a small aristocracy could provide the center of town social activities or set a tone of restrained and dignified wealth.

The Magnificent Ambersons is a tragedy, as Howells clearly perceived it to be. It documents the loss of certain qualities of life and shows how the antagonism and mistrust between the old order and the new order creates a discontinuity of social leadership. The old order is doomed to fall because of its anachronistic attitudes toward money and its inflexibility in the face of change. But its loss is a significant one, and certain values of the old order and the older way of life must temper the uncertain values of the new order. The novel reminded readers of the human resources and

feelings that could be genuinely felt and known, regardless of the chaos and pain of the moment: gentleness, fellow feeling and concern, devotion to the memory of those loved for their ability to love, magnanimity, magnificence of spirit, and sympathy. In a world and nation undergoing or about to undergo the great shocks of war, disease, internal recriminations, and post-war convulsions, The Magnificent Ambersons represented an antidote to modernism and uncontrollable change. It ends with a silent reconciliation of the old order, now reconciled and adjusted to the present, and the new order, now mindful of the values of the past. Out of the chaos of change the dim beginnings of an enlightened new order is suggested where human values will provide the wellsprings of conduct. Each generation of Americans would have to learn that "strange and hard discovery that matter should serve man's spirit." In this remarkable and prophetic novel, Tarkington saw clearly the dilemma of the modern industrial and technological age, and he indicated that the resolution of the dilemma would have to take place in people's hearts. It was a simple answer, but then simple answers have a way of being dismissed or crushed under the weight of complexities and change.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>All page references cited in the text are to the Avon Books paperback edition of The Magnificent Ambersons, Tenth Printing (Bard Edition).

<sup>2</sup>Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, edited by Mildred Howells (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), Volume Two, p. 389.

<sup>3</sup>Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, p. 390.

<sup>4</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 177.

## Sherwood Anderson and Edmund Wilson

David D. Anderson

In March, 1942, Sherwood Anderson had been dead for a year, but his critical reputation had collapsed more than a decade before, the nation was at war, and the mythologized story of a literary life of an imagination that had presumably failed so long before should, according to all logic, be of little importance at a time marked by American collapse in the Phillippines and the rising spectre of a new America whose destiny was remote from the towns, villages, and countryside that had provided the foundation of Anderson's early, great short fiction.

Nevertheless, when Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs, the book he had worked at sporadically for nearly a decade under a number of titles, appeared at the end of that first wartime winter, edited by his longtime friend, Paul Rosenfeld, the event was neither unnoticed nor unmarked: nearly a hundred reviews appeared in periodicals across the country, not merely to record the event, but to assess the work and the career that had preceeded it.

Not surprisingly, the reviews were mixed, just as critical opinions of Anderson's work had, for more than a decade, been, at best, also mixed. The reactions to Memoirs predictably ranged from ecstatic to denunciatory, from condescending to nostalgic, from elegaic to regretful,

but much, too, seemed simply uncomprehending. Many of them were brief and anonymous, but others were extended essays by names that had become critical household words. Whereas "E.H.," in the Dayton (Ohio) News wrote that the Memoirs are merely repetitions of Anderson's earlier work, so much so that the earlier work might have been re-edited for this, Harlan Hatcher, in his column, "Harlan Hatcher Says," in the Columbus (Ohio) Citizen, wrote that the Memoirs are not retellings of a story Anderson had told many times in the past, but a fresh distillation of the essence of Anderson's experience and that of America in his time. While an anonymous reviewer in the New Yorker commented that the Memoirs "contain little that is not to be found in his other books, except a few rather pointless literary reminiscences and some odd, vague stories of his early sexual life," Maxwell Geismar wrote in the Yale Review that "Anderson had the ill luck, as was T.S. Eliot's lot also, to become an ancestor before he became mature."

Geismar went on, in this most perceptive of the nearly one hundred reviews of the Memoirs:

The generation of T.K. Whipple invoked Anderson as prophet and pioneer. If this was too soon and perhaps too generous, our own younger critics have been late and stingy; patting Anderson gently on the shoulder, they have ignored his achievement. In such context, "Sherwood Anderson's Memoirs" is, of course a key work; we come to it with great interest; and if we read only its open sections, we are likely to be disappointed. . . .



. . . With Anderson's youth. . . we come upon his familiar mixed tone. The "Memoirs" repeat Anderson's confused values, the egotism, the fragmentary intuitions and unanswered questions, the poetic rhapsodies; not so much the preoccupation with sex but the fancy treatment of it. . . We come, in short, upon the enigmatic, disturbing, half-honest and half-exhibitionistic light which Anderson insists on turning upon himself. . .

But with the wonderful story of Rice, who was Anderson's mechanic friend, the "Memoirs" takes on a different tone. Rice the bicycle-striper, with his disgust for the new techniques. . . contains in himself the whole machine change of Anderson's America. . . In the "Memoirs," from this point on, more than in any other single work of Anderson's we feel his quality, his stature. And Anderson's quality is vital, his stature is big. . .

It was this review that engendered a letter later that Fall to Geismar from Edmund Wilson, who was then, at 47, already the dean of American critics. Wilson wrote,

. . . About Anderson: I've been impressed by his autobiography, too. How middle-class he makes Sinclair Lewis and a lot of other people look! For him the inhabitants of a little Ohio town were just as important and on just the same level as the people with names that he afterwards met in Chicago and New York. He and Dreiser were, in my opinion, the only really first-rate men who came out of the Middle West in that period. I liked him very much personally--will tell you about him when I see you. He was not irritating at all personally, but one of the most agreeable men I have ever known. . . when he told you stories, it was as good as Huckleberry Finn. . .

In a sense, this letter was Wilson's summation of Anderson's career, and it marked the end of a relationship that had begun in Paris more than twenty years earlier. Wilson, then a twenty-seven-year old writer, had just resigned his editorial job at Vanity Fair to write books.

and "to save my soul by emigrating into a country which humiliates me intellectually and artistically. . ."

Wilson's stay in Paris and in Europe was, however, brief, but it coincided with Anderson's first visit to Europe with his friend Paul Rosenfeld and his second wife, Tennessee Mitchell. In his memoir of Paul Rosenfeld, written in 1947, Wilson recounted what was almost a meeting:

It was in Paris sometime in the summer of 1921, and I was dining alone one night in a favorite Italian restaurant, very clean and rather austere --I remember it as always quiet and filled with a clear twilight--to which I had been taken first by somebody during the war and to which I liked to return, ordering almost always the same meal that I had had when I first went there: ravioli and Asti Spumante. A party of three sat down at the table just across from mine, and though I had never seen any of them before, I recognized them soon as Paul Rosenfeld, Sherwood Anderson, and Anderson's wife, the sculptress, Tennessee Mitchell. I had heard in New York that Paul was taking the Andersons to Europe, where Anderson had never been, and I observed the party with interest and heard snatches of their conversation. . . I was reminded of the incident later when I read in Sherwood Anderson's memoirs that he had sat in the Tuileries one day--here he is apostrophizing himself--with "tears running from your eyes, because you thought everything around you so beautiful." It was all very typical of the period. . .

Perhaps the incident was as typical of the period for Wilson in retrospect as it may have been for Anderson. But in recounting it, Wilson reveals a good deal about himself in his memory of the incident and his retrospective analysis. Wilson at the time was the outsider, desperately determined to become part of the life of letters the others



represented. Wilson certainly had read Anderson--although he was newly-graduated from Princeton when Windy McPherson's Son was published in 1916 and an enlisted man in France when Marching Men, Mid-American Chants, and Winesburg, Ohio were published, he had surely, as managing editor of Vanity Fair, been familiar with Anderson's essay, "Why There Must Be a Midwestern Literature," in that magazine in March, 1921. But no correspondence had passed between them, and Anderson was yet unaware of Wilson's existence.

For both Wilson and Anderson the trip to Europe was not expatriation but an interlude, and while Wilson returned to Vanity Fair, Anderson returned briefly to Chicago, determined to break permanently with advertising, with what remained of the Chicago renaissance, and with Tennessee. In October he returned to New York to receive the Dial Prize of \$2,000 for a gifted "younger" writer. Anderson was forty-five at the time, and then he spent the winter in New Orleans, where he worked furiously on Many Marriages, both for serial publication in the Dial and for a longer book publication. Pleased with the reception if not the sales of The Triumph of the Egg the previous fall, he returned to Chicago, made his break final, stopped briefly in Elyria and Cleveland, Ohio, scenes of his business success and failure, and returned to New York.

That August, shortly after Anderson's arrival in New York, he and Wilson met for the first time, an event both of them recorded in letters. On August 21, Anderson



noted in a letter to his brother Karl that "One day last week I was lunching with Mr. Edmund Wilson, editor of Vanity Fair. . . Wilson and I had a conversation about Miss Stein. . ." For Wilson, the meeting--or meetings--were more memorable. To John Peale Bishop, his collaborator on The Undertaker's Garland, his first book, Wilson wrote,

. . . Sherwood Anderson has suddenly arrived in town and decided to live here more or less permanently. I have seen him a number of times and think he is great. He has a very high opinion of you, he tells me. He described his new novel to me the other day--Many Marriages, which is to appear in The Dial--and it is one of the damnest things ever written. It is a sort of wonderful erotic nightmare full of strange symbolic scenes reared on the old circus ground of American life. . .

Although the shortened version of Many Marriages appeared in the Dial between October, 1922, and March, 1923, apparently Wilson did not read it in the abbreviated form, but when it appeared in book form, expanded, Anderson was to comment later, as the result of an "irresistible impulse" and published by B.W. Huebsch in February, 1923, Wilson was asked to review it for the Dial. His review, the only review he was ever to write of an Anderson work, appeared in April. The novel was Anderson's first artistic failure--although F. Scott Fitzgerald had described it as a "haunting" work and Anderson's best. Wilson found the review difficult to write, but he was determined to be honest, if tempered, in his criticism:

I cannot regard Many Marriages, the new novel by Sherwood Anderson, as a quite worthy successor to The Triumph of the Egg. . . It may be that I am not in a position to judge Many Marriages quite fairly, because the author, at the time he was writing it, once told me the story at length. It then seemed to me fresh and surprising. . . In the telling, it had all of the quality that has often brought Anderson, at his best, closer to the art of the poet than to that of the writer of fiction. But when I came to read the story in its extended form, I found it tedious and sometimes flat. . .

Yet, in spite of the feebleness, even flabbiness, of the texture of Many Marriages, the book is not wholly devoid of the queer and disquieting impressiveness which one feels in all Anderson's work. Here as elsewhere, we are soothed as well as disturbed by the feeling of hands thrust down among the organs of life--hands that are delicate and clean but still pitiless in their explorations. . . My only quarrel here with Mr. Anderson is that he has not thrust down so far as usual. . . Yet even when Sherwood Anderson cannot save a banal theme from banality, his banality is something distinct from the banality of other people. He has arrived at it all by himself. At his best, Sherwood Anderson functions with a natural ease and beauty on a plane in the depths of life--as if under a diving-bell submerged in the human soul--which makes the world of the ordinary novelist seem stagy and superficial. At his worst, as in Many Marriages, one feels, as one cannot feel in the cases of so many of his contemporaries, that he is at least, in the pursuit of his own ideal, making his own mistakes.

Wilson's review, neither as good nor as bad as it might have been, did little to either cement or inhibit the relationship between him and Anderson, who had other things on his mind: the financial failure of the book, denunciations of it by clergymen and other moralists, and a new love whom he had met in New York, Elizabeth Prall, the bookish thirty-eight-year old manager of the



Doubleday Doran Book Shop at Fifth Avenue and 43rd Street. Determined to divorce Tennessee and marry Elizabeth, Anderson went off to Reno, where he was to spend nearly a year and publish two books, Horses and Men and A Story Teller's Story before Tennessee gave her consent to the divorce. In April, 1924, the divorce was granted, and he and Elizabeth married immediately, spent a short time in Berkeley, and then wandered to New Orleans, where he intended to stay. There he began work on what was to become Dark Laughter.

During the year Anderson spent in Reno and his interval in New Orleans, Wilson remained his staunchest critical supporter, frequently comparing him favorably with other writers and works. In a November, 1922, review of a volume of Eugene O'Neill's plays, he commented, ". . . One felt that Mr. O'Neill, in his gift for drawing music from humble people, had a kinship with Sherwood Anderson," and in a July, 1924, review of Ring Lardner's collection of stories, facetiously called How to Write Short Stories, he wrote,

. . . It is curious to speculate what would have happened to some of the stories in this collection if they had been written by Sherwood Anderson. Two of Lardner's baseball players. . . may almost be called neurotics; and a third. . . is evidently quite insane. What startling pre-occupations might not have been revealed to the reader if Sherwood Anderson had X-rayed their deepest insides. . .



In the early Spring of 1926, Wilson visited Anderson in New Orleans, a visit which Wilson described in impressionistic detail in his journal, which was later edited by Leon Edel and published after Wilson's death. In 1957, however, Wilson extracted a portion from the journal and included it in The American Earthquake and followed it with a comment written for its publication. The excerpt is called "A New Orleanian," and it recounts-- in an approximation of Midwestern-cum-Southern dialect (or what may pass for such a mixture to a Northeastern ear)--a tale told by a Mississippi riverman's experience in a flood. Wilson comments in the descriptive note that the story

... was relayed to me by Sherwood Anderson-- who was at that time living in New Orleans--from his Mississippi steamboating days. He liked to talk about his memories of these. He had had a mulatto mistress with whom he liked to travel and whom he made sound very attractive. I urged him to write all this; but I realized that something prevented him from writing the stories he told or writing anything in the way he talked. His idea of literature seemed partly to have been derived. . . from the Dial and the Steiglitz group and other writers whom he had met when he came to New York and who had encouraged him to take himself seriously. All these persons were city-bred and they had had no such experience of the common life as that from which Sherwood Anderson had gleaned his Mississippi stories. . .

To this statement one must add that neither had Wilson the kind of experience that he attributes to Anderson, nor, for that matter, did Anderson himself. Anderson's Mississippi experience, like that of most

Americans, past and present, came undiluted from Huckleberry Finn. Wilson in 1926 had not yet learned to distinguish between Sherwood Anderson the raconteur, the son of his father, who, when given an attentive audience, found it impossible to distinguish between fact and faction, and Anderson the artist who, in his work, always sought to define the truth that lies beyond appearance. For that Anderson, Mark Twain's truth could never be his, nor could he use it in his fiction.

Wilson, like many of his contemporaries--Waldo Frank and Van Wyck Brooks, in particular--never did seem to see the real Anderson, Anderson the artist, but rather the corn-field mystic that they were convinced that he was. And Anderson, to whom a metaphor drawn from an advertising office would be more appropriate than one from the farm, delighted in pulling sophisticated legs on occasion. On one occasion he had written to Brooks that "my new book, Poor White, [is] about laid by, as we out here say of the corn crop in October. It is in shocks and stood up in the field. The husking is yet to do. . ."

Anderson knew that to many of his Easter friends--with Paul Rosenfeld always an exception--the rustic Anderson was the real Anderson, and he delighted in giving that impression. When Wilson wrote in Axel's Castle in 1931 that "for Anderson, though he may seek in New Orleans the leisure and ease of the Old South, it is



the factories of Ohio which still stick in his crop."

Anderson wrote to him, not entirely tongue-in-cheek:

I want to thank you for Axel's Castle, to me a profound book. Would to God I had your learning.

I think that is the way it will all turn out concerning Joyce, Stein, Proust, Valery, etc.

I presume there is another sort of learning, not always sticking your ear out to the future while you stare into the past.

A walk in any factory town, workers, machines, shop windows, motors in the streets--the machine accepted into life, brought into actual consciousness. I have the feeling most of the time that we live now, mentally and emotionally, in one world, while physically we live in another. If there is sick weariness affecting us all, making it hard to work, wouldn't that account for it?

Axel's Castle is a grand book.

The sickness of which Anderson wrote was on the horizon, and it was to draw together Anderson and Wilson and other intellectuals as nothing else could do. This sickness was the depression of the 1930's, and the closeness of activity led many of them, Anderson and Wilson included, to a sympathy, if not an alliance, with Communism as a movement and as a cure for the sickness of industrialism run rampant. On a swing through the South, in early summer, 1931, to examine at first-hand the violent strikes in the cotton mills and the coal mines, as well as to look into the infamous Scottsboro case, Wilson visited Anderson in Marion, Virginia, where Anderson had gone to live in 1926. As he continued west, he wrote Anderson at length on his observations:

. . . I went to Chattanooga, one of America's horrible towns, what with the niggers and the mills.



I discovered to my surprise that the Communists were having considerable success there. For the niggers, Communism is a new and exciting kind of revivalism. . . . I had a most enjoyable visit at Marion--was glad to find you going strong. Most of the writers have been dopeless, despondent, and drunken lately--worse than the bond salesmen and brokers. . . .

Good luck with your novel--which I'm anxious to read. . . .

Anderson was at work on what was to be published in 1932 as Beyond Desire, like Marching Men fifteen years earlier, Anderson's call to action against oppression. But he wrote back to Wilson immediately:

I got a wire from Tom Tippet at Charleston--I guess it was after you left there--wanting me to come over and address the strikers from the courthouse steps. I didn't go. I had engaged to go down South.

I might have gone just the same, but was uncertain. I have a queer feeling just now about pulling people out on strike. We go and stir them up. Out they come and presently get licked. Then we go comfortably off. It seems to me that [if] we, of what I presume you might call the intelligentsia, are to go in at all with the workers, perhaps we should be ready to go all the way. I mean that we should be willing to go live with them in their way and take it in the neck with them.

I suppose the Negroes are good Communist material, but they will be making a mistake, won't they, if they take that material just because it is easy? . . .

I have had a bad week's slump, but am feeling more like writing again. It was great fun seeing you. I hope you will come this way again. Some of these days we'll do that stunt, get in the car and go off bumming together. . . .

Anderson's reluctance to commit himself less than completely to a cause he was unable to follow through was to be evident in Beyond Desire, to some critics' dismay, but it was not evident at the time to Wilson, .

who reported on the visit with Anderson to John Dos  
Passos:

I found Sherwood Anderson all full of  
Communism. He doesn't know much about it,  
but the idea has given him a powerful afflatus.  
He has a new girl, a radical Y.W.C.A. sec-  
retary, who took him around to the mills.  
He is writing a novel with a Communist hero  
and I have never seen him so much aroused. . . .

The young lady was, of course, Eleanor Copenhaver,  
whom Anderson married in 1933 and who was largely re-  
sponsible for his social awareness as well as the com-  
passion for the people of the Virginia hills that marked  
his work for the rest of his life. But Anderson, like  
his hero, Red Oliver in Beyond Desire, was full, not of  
Communism, but of compassion, and they were both deter-  
mined to stand and be counted on the side of justice and  
the people.

During the next few months Anderson finished the  
novel, and in a spirit of depression about the state of  
the nation, traveled to California, visiting Tom Mooney  
in prison, and to Minnesota. On his return to Virginia  
in the early spring he received from Wilson a copy of a  
manifesto drawn up by Wilson, Waldo Frank, and Lewis  
Mumford. It was, in effect, a call by intellectuals to  
revolution. In signing it--he later admitted, when it  
threatened his friendship with Paul Rosenfeld, that is  
was a mistake--he wrote to Wilson that "I wouldn't mind  
saying Wilson to you that if any time anything comes up



like this manifesto and my name has any value you are at liberty to use it. Wherever you are willing to go I'll go." The manifesto concluded:

Wherefore, in our function as writers:

- a. We declare ourselves supporters of the social-economic revolution--such revolution being an immediate step toward the creation in the United States of a new human culture based on common material possession, which shall release the energies of man to spiritual and intellectual endeavor.
- b. We recognize the fundamental identity of our interests with those of the workers and farmers of the nation.
- c. We call upon our fellow writers, artists, teachers, scholars, engineers, and intellectuals of every kind, to identify their cause with that of the workers, in whose ultimate capacity to rise and to rule rests the destiny of America and mankind.

When Paul Rosenfeld recognized this manifest for the pretentious claptrap that it was, both in an article, "The Authors and Politics," in Scribner's in May, 1933, and in a letter to Anderson, Anderson had already participated in an equally pretentious--and unsuccessful--attempt to protest to President Hoover his treatment of the bonus marchers and he had written an "open letter" to the President protesting his own treatment as well. But then his sense of the absurd began again to emerge. He wrote to Rosenfeld almost in expiation:

. . . I did again desire with all my heart to participate. I think I knew that mistakes would be made in such things as manifestoes signed, etc., declarations made that might be a[t] bottom nonsense, but-- . . .

During the last year I have reached out all I could. I have been writing letters to men all over the country, asking them to try



to state for me, as clearly as they could, what they now thought and felt. . . .

Anderson's interest returned, as abruptly as it had departed, to the human lives that for him were the substance of all art and meaning, and while Wilson continued to man the proletarian barricades, Anderson put together Death in the Woods, a collection of stories in the Winesburg manner, but wiser, and the two men drifted apart, their contacts more frequently through others than directly. When Anderson participated in a writer's residency at Olivet College in Michigan in the summer of 1939, Wilson visited him there, and he later commented that "I find that I'm a little dismayed-- though perhaps unnecessarily--at seeing how many of the literati are taking to teaching as what Partisan Review calls 'a crutch.'" But he had a good visit, and he gave Anderson a copy of To the Finland Station, his rejection of Stalinism and revolution. To Anderson it was a manifestation of growth--or age--on both their parts, and he wrote that

As for Wilson, how can you blame him? The revolution, after Stalin, got so lost. I agree with him that now there is no other position than that of the isolationist you can take. I feel that way, although Eleanor does not. Of course, she isn't a Stalinist. She does, however, still dream of a real revolution. . . .

Anderson's battles had been fought, and with less than two years to live, he had retired with honor if not

victory, and in a sense, this letter marks the epitaph of his friendship with Wilson. Wilson's epitaph of Anderson was to come after Anderson's death, when, in an essay for the Princeton University Library Chronicle, February, 1944, he wrote,

Two of our best poets of fiction, Sherwood Anderson and F. Scott Fitzgerald, have died prematurely, depriving us of a freshening and exhilarating influence that had been felt by us as principles of life, and leaving a sad sense of work uncompleted (though Anderson was in his sixties, it was impossible to think of him as aging, and though he had published a score of books, he seemed always still making his way toward some further self-realization).

Or Wilson might have said, as Anderson did in the words which appear on his monument on the hill overlooking Marion, "Life, Not Death, is the Great Adventure."

Michigan State University

THE FACTORY:

a memoir

William Thomas

My first day at the factory I was given a badge, to be worn always during working hours, and an identification card, to be shown the guard on entering the clockhouse every morning; and taken to the Plant Protection Department for fingerprinting. I thought of a time when I would have resented this indignity; now it was merely another step on the way to becoming a worker in industry, like the physical examination by a Company doctor, like getting the identification photograph with the number across your chest that made you look as if it had been taken at the police station an hour after your arrest on a charge of murder.

Eventually the Personnel man escorting me (and several others) left me with the Production Control Department foreman, who referred me to a supervisor, who turned me over to a leadman, who put me in charge of a crew chief, who said we would take a tour of the plant. He was a young man who talked glibly about the various departments as we went through them, Material Control, the Machine Shop, Welding, Processing, Sheet Metal Fabrication, Sub-assembly, Upholstery, Surface



Assembly, and the assembly line. My previous industrial experience had been in a railroad roundhouse, and I remembered that place as a grimy, detestable, almost horrible dungeon (how odious such surroundings can be when one is sixteen ), from which one emerged in the condition of Samuel Johnson's Cyclops. Here even the machine shop was clean. Elsewhere it was light and airy and clean enough to set up housekeeping in. And the airplanes, as we progressed to the end of the assembly line and I saw them in complete and nearly complete stages, were things of beauty. With their smooth aluminum surfaces, all details of their great complexity functional, they were beauty identified with function.

The noise of the riveting in Primary Assembly was terrific, and I knew I could never become used to it; but a little ways off, in other departments, I was not bothered by it. It was mid-forenoon before my crew chief and guide appeared to think I had been shown enough. As yet no one was concerned with my doing anything in the nature of work. My duty, he explained, was moving parts in a pushcart, from one spot to various others as they advanced in the manufacturing process. Such work would be only temporary, he went on, as if I might feel it beneath my dignity. As soon as I learned my way about the factory I would be given a better job;

few men stayed on the trucking crew (where everybody in Department 77 began) longer than three or four weeks. He introduced me to another young man, Max Demuth. "Just go around with Max a couple of days."

Max and I worked from the Production Control point in the Paint Department. The inspectors laid approved lots of parts--they were either small formed pieces or assemblies of aluminum sheet or welded assemblies of steel tubing--after painting on a bench, whence we took them to the stockroom of the next department according to the routing of the shop order with them. The things I needed to know--to identify the department by number, to remember where it was and how to get there--were bewildering, and I had to ask Max the same thing several times. But he was very patient with me. "Who are the important-looking men there talking so earnestly?" I asked. "Aw, they aint big guys," he said. "A lot of guys around here look like big guys, but they aint."

At eleven thirty we ate lunch from our pails at the control point. I was tired with walking over the concrete floors and would have been glad to sit more than half an hour; but at twelve we had to resume work. At two o'clock the whistle blew for the afternoon five-minute smoke period, as for the forenoon period at nine thirty, during which everyone was permitted to smoke at his post, except in the paint room and some other places of hazard. I was



not a smoker but was glad for a rest. My feet were hurting, and I wanted nothing so much as to get out of there and go home. A few minutes before three thirty Max took care that we were in position to make a quick exit. You could feel the tempo of activity slackening. But it was unwise to be seen walking toward the door with your lunch pail in hand before the whistle blew; so by the time we got outside there were already lines to the clock house. I found my time card, punched out, and opened my pail for the guard's inspection as I went through the gate.

In the parking lot there was already a traffic jam. I couldn't get my car out of its space because of cars that filled the lanes. I could only sit, wait, and ponder on the spectacle of men who were on the whole doubtless quite decent fellows pushing, rushing, impatiently blowing horns in their great desire and effort to get away from this place, where they must have been bored, to another, where boredom awaited them. As I drove out at last, I determined I would not compete; I would keep a book in my car, in order that I might sit quietly and read till the jam subsided. I was then reading Besant's All in a Garden Fair (Kipling in Something of Myself said it was his "salvation in sore personal need", and I thought it might be helpful to me), but did not find it interesting enough to read in more than fifteen or twenty minutes at



a time, so it proved the ideal book for my purpose. I didn't finish it till years later, when the war was over, but I read a lot of it that fall.

Although I was accustomed to walking, for several days and nights my legs ached with fatigue. But instead of tight dress oxfords such as many of my fellow employees wore, I wore stout wide-toed work shoes with full uppers, which were as comfortable as shoes could be. After ten days I was made a "follow-up" man. Every morning the clerk of the assembly-line stockroom I was assigned to handed me a list of shortages, and my new task was to find what department a release (the total quantity in fabrication at one time) of each of these parts was active in, and hasten it through the remaining steps of fabrication or assembly into the stockroom. Parts being expedited to eliminate a shortage were "hot"; if the quantity in the stockroom were to become exhausted, the assembly line would be slowed, possibly even stopped, and such a shortage was a "shutdown" shortage. Accordingly, a "shutdown" ticket was attached to the shop order accompanying the parts as notice that work on them was to be completed as soon as possible. By the process of truncation that so enlivens the English language, this ticket, and the order itself, became a "shutdown". I had to locate the order by securing the routing (this word was

always pronounced with the diphthong au in the first syllable) from the Production Control office and checking the control points of the various departments or the records of the Inspection Department till I discovered where it was active, and attached a shutdown ticket. That, however, did not end my concern with it. I had to return to see that dispatchers, truckers, and inspectors did not delay in performing their duties; I was not done with it till the parts were in the stockroom, which might be a matter of days. And for every order I successfully "closed out" another shortage awaited me.

There were always shortages. A new model, a bombardier trainer designated by the Army Air Corps as the AT-11, was going into production, and I was assigned to work on it as well as on the established model, the AT-7, a navigator trainer. I met what appeared to be insuperable difficulties. After long search--for I did not know short cuts or where to look first for information--I would find no shop order had been issued by the Production Planning Department; the reason was that there were tooling problems not overcome; perhaps the die or form block that made the part was not made; possibly the drawing of this part was not even released by Engineering. Such facts I learned slowly--and painfully--for the burden of getting the part built was mine.

There were so many follow-up men that their activity

hampered the productive departments' personnel. A report was required of every follow-up man every day on every part he was charged with expediting--where it was and how soon it was expected to close out, or, if it were not being fabricated, why. If no prospect obtained of the tooling's being completed for weeks, it was still not sufficient to say that simply; you had to see somebody and get his word on it, rephrase the statement, make it read as if you were doing your utmost to move a mountain, when no more could be done toward that end than was, in the normal course of events, being done.

No use was ever made of the particular information; by the time it reached the Production Department foreman it was obsolete and valueless. Methods and procedures were chaotic. I could not persuade myself that I liked my job, which seemed to consist in coercing others to perform the duties regularly delegated to them. So at my request I was given a new assignment, that of assistant dispatcher in the supplemental plant, where another model, a small passenger biplane, was built. The duty of dispatching consisted in issuing shop orders and material or parts to the shop departments for fabrication or assembly, and here included stock-keeping. Stockroom facilities were poor, and shop personnel had yet to be educated to production control and regular procedures of fabrication, rejection, and reissuance of shop orders



for replacement of rejected parts. "But here," said the supervisor, "we think we know what we're doing."

There I was busy and comfortable. It was fine weather that fall, and on bright mornings when the sunlight streamed through the east windows and the open big east doorway I was exhilarated by the thought of my liberation from the academic world, of being delivered from its pomposities, its shams, its toadyism. In the factory I could do what I had to do without need to "impress" somebody, and I went about my work with a freedom from care that sometimes became a gentle joy, an almost-happiness.

There was little talk of the war, either before or after the entry into it of the United States. Some men were glad they were in what came to be called "essential" industry, because they were later granted draft deferments; but for most their jobs meant bread and butter, and events affected their thinking little. Some, however, were veterans of the war before; and it was a solemn group who listened while they ate lunch to the President's speech and speeches of members of Congress on the radio brought into the weld shop the 8th of December 1941.

My education continued. Procedures were constantly changing, production was expanding, and I no longer had Saturdays off duty, or even Saturday afternoons. Many

new people were brought in; women appeared in all departments. I was made dispatcher in the weld shop, and had a helper. I worked overtime. I had periodic increases in pay. I learned to read blueprints and took a night course in production planning and control. There before the attack on Pearl Harbor, I was a veteran now. I received the lapel pin and certificate awarded for meritorious performance, which pronounced me a Beech Busy Bee.

But I had learned all there was for me to learn in the shop. With the close of 1942 I asked for and was granted a transfer to the Production Planning Department, being first a member of the Status Group (pronounced with the short a), whose concern was the correction of shop orders held pending in Production Control point files, following engineering changes, substitution of material, or changes in tooling. I didn't have to learn how to do this, and was put in charge of the Status desk, where I stayed, except for a few weeks' special assignment in the Engineering Department, for six months. Thereafter, in the Spares Planning Group, I wrote shop orders from blueprints and tool cards, and later supervised the issuance of shop orders for spare parts contracts.

There were always troubles. For installation in the field, many spare parts, hinges for example, were to be shipped without rivet holes in them. But the shop

personnel, familiar with the part itself, would overlook the "do not drill" instruction and drill the holes, whereupon the rejected lot had to be overstocked and absorbed by a Production release, necessitating re-issuance of the Spares order--to which the same thing was likely to happen another time. There were always engineering, tooling, and material changes to effect, and the recurrent failure of someone, somewhere, to perform his share of the duty. Or a member of the Production Planning Group, more zealous than knowing, would change a Spares order that ought not to have been changed. A commonplace remark was that we wondered how airplanes ever got built. The Scheduling Department, however, made production less hit-or-miss in 1944 than it was two years earlier; airplanes did get built, and flew.

Like soldiers, I suffered most from monotony. The routine was inflexible: rise at five thirty, thirty minutes to prepare and eat breakfast, twenty minutes to shave, ten minutes to dress, twenty-five minutes to start the car, drive to the plant, and clock in with a comfortable margin of time before seven o'clock; at my desk till three thirty or five, six days a week. It was sorely trying to me, unfitted by temperament to endure routine. Refusing to relinquish my intellectual interests, I came to shun such sociality as war time



permitted; for a dinner-table or evening conversation would invariably come to or come back to the war, and, after a day when I might have seen a hysterically sobbing girl stumbling through a corridor, I wished to talk about anything else. If I tried to talk about books, my companions would bring up war books; or discourse on a lecture by a war correspondent or a news commentator that I was sure was compounded of the same ambiguity and misinformation prevalent in 1918. I would have been grateful to hear a lecture on Wolfram von Eschenbach or Walter Map; to discuss Christopher Marlowe or the Brontës or to debate the merits of Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Steinbeck; to read verses of John Donne or Thomas Nashe to anybody who would listen.

It was books that helped me through, as they have done for countless mortals distressed by man's iniquity and folly. I read many novels, new and old, and Homer and Dante and Montaigne and Shakespeare and Boswell. When I tried reading Paradise Lost aloud, ten minutes of the verse rhythm would put me to sleep, and I had to give that up. But literature as an anodyne is superior to liquor or libertinism only in that it offers more enduring surcease; whatever means is used, the purpose is the same.

Before the nearly four years' ordeal ended, I came to regard my going to work in the factory as a therapeutic

action. Whereas I'd thought to heal my mind by working with my hands, I'd put myself where I had to think as much and as hard as ever, about matters remote from anything I was by nature drawn to. I knew that what I was doing toward winning the war could have been done as well by someone who liked to do it, and that I ought to be doing what I was equipped to do. I hadn't gained, instead I had lost, by turning my back on my kind; away from the academic, I'd discovered myself among sycophants of another sort. Many occasions brought to mind the words uttered by Max, the companion of my novitiate: "A lot of guys around here look like big guys, but they aint."

The war's end made it easy to leave the job. When the date came, it was like being mustered out of the army, something you look forward to a long time and then experience with regret for the life you are putting behind. It wasn't the life you'd have chosen, in truth it wasn't living at all, was years subtracted from the total of those allotted you. As help to making up the main account it added up to almost nothing, for most of it was irksome and dull. Yet it had some joyous moments too, and it will never come to you again.

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